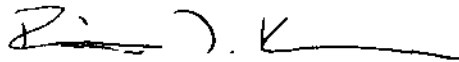


**Wingless Wonders:  
A Collection of Poetry**

An Honors Thesis  
(HONRS 499)

by  
Elizabeth Nethery

Thesis Advisor  
River Karner

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "River Karner", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana

November 2003

Expected Date of Graduation  
December 2003

## ABSTRACT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

“Wingless Wonders: A Collection of Poetry” is a compilation of eighteen original poems specifically revised and written as a capstone of undergraduate work. Each poem is a reflection of life designed to capture moments of laughter, sadness, hope, fear and more. “Writing Throughout My Life” is a personal essay serves as a preface to the selection of poetry included in this collection. It details the effects of language from early childhood to present day that have helped to shape this project.

I can't thank River Karner enough for her  
guidance throughout the construction of this  
project. Without her help this collection  
would not be what it is today.

I would also like to thank all those who have  
touched my life, giving me much  
encouragement to write and keep writing.  
You are the inspiration behind everything I  
write.

# CONTENTS

---

Writing Throughout My Life:	
A Personal Essay	i
More Than A Crush	1
NOTICE: Missing Cat	3
Just Another Holiday	4
Before I Moved	4
Muted Tuesday	5
4 a.m.	5
Lost With a Diploma	6
Fortune Cookie	7
Family Reunion	7
Through the Looking Glass	8
Worm	9
Reflection After a Friend's Death	10
The Tag Faces Out	11
One Minute Memory	11
Aura	12
In the Parking Lot at Arby's	12
Night Shift	13

## Writing Throughout My Life

I was born at 10:12 in the morning on March 25, 1981 to John and Sharon Nethery in the basement of Norton's hospital Louisville, Kentucky. I was the first of three children; more specifically, I was the first girl born in twenty-five years on my maternal side of the family. This naturally led to my becoming spoiled rotten. I cannot say though, if this matter made any contribution to my highly developed imagination as a child.

Growing up my mother constantly read to me. I remember in the wintertime we would curl up next to the fire, hide a stack of books under the covers and then choose a few at random to read before bed. Every night, whether or not in front of the fire, my mother would read to me. By the time I was four years old I already had my favorites picked from my extensive collection of Sesame Street and Golden books: "When is Saturday" and "Special Delivery." We would read those two books so often it wasn't long before I was reading them back to her from memorization.

I was recording my own stories before I could even write via oral communication. From the ages of three to five I would carry with me a red plastic tape recorder everywhere I went. This modern invention allowed me to capture songs, stories and tidbits of information that I came across during my daily adventures with my two imaginary friends. Each time I hit the record button I would begin, "Hello, my name is Elizabeth." I would go on to report things such as what my mother was watching on television, conversations between my mother and grandmother, and what my brother was eating for breakfast. Without even knowing it I had created my very first personal journal.

Later, in kindergarten I learned the alphabet from exercise books by Pleasant T. Rowland called "To Read, To Write and Listen." Each book covered one letter of the alphabet. The last workbook I remember completing was M. The book revolved around magic and came with a 3-D finder which, at the age of five, made M my favorite letter of the alphabet. Unfortunately, it was also the last letter of the alphabet I learned that school year. My class went on so many fieldtrips that year, over ten, that I never learned what came after M. It wasn't until I entered the first grade class of Mrs. Leichman that anyone took any real notice to the fact that I couldn't read. While most of the other kids were zooming past me in reading, I struggled with comprehending not only sentences but also words. Mrs. Leichman recognized the issue and made it priority that, with

her help and the help of my mother, I would be reading by the end of the school year. When May came around I was not only able to read, but I had also moved from the 'slow' to 'accelerated' reading corner of the classroom. Once I started reading I just couldn't stop; reading became my hobby as a child and still is today.

Mrs. Leichman was also the first person to introduce me to the world of writing. She was constantly encouraging us as students to write stories by providing us with lined paper cut into various shapes. She has snowman shaped paper for wintertime stories, pumpkin shaped for Halloween, even bear shaped for stories inspired by bears. At different times during the school year she would type our stories and make compilations of the class' work to send home to our families. We as student would write the words as we thought each sounded and Mrs. Leichman would translate by typing the correct spelling below what we had written. To this day I still have one of these photocopied collections.

My love for reading and writing that Mrs. Leichman had nurtured carried on throughout the rest of my grade school years. In third grade each student was required to keep a daily journal for Mrs. Wagner our English teacher. This was probably the best training any teacher could give a young writer. Each day we would take time from our classroom activities to sit silently in class and just write about anything that crossed our young minds. I learned soon after that one can quickly overcome writer's block by practicing *rite tuchus*. Third grade was also the year that I worked on my very first newspaper. As a class project Mrs. Wagner had our class divide into groups and work together to produce our very own newspaper. Mind you, they were all hand written and stapled. Unfortunately, in third grade I didn't know what use the computer had other than for playing Oregon Trail. So, my group of all girls and I broke out our neon markers to compose the "N.K.O.T.B." the New Kids On The Block section of the "Third Grade News." Its pages included brief bios of each band members, concert news and pictures photocopied from books and magazines. It's amazing to me now what children can achieve with the encouragement and creativity of a caring teacher.

One of the programs that gave me the most motivation to continue reading throughout grade school was "Book-It." After reading ten books you would receive a sticker for your "Book-It" button from the teacher in charge of the program. Upon receiving the sticker you could take your button to your local Pizza Hut in exchange for a personal pan pizza. This program was the best thing I had ever encountered. I loved to read and for that I received almost every child's favorite food, pizza. I can clearly

remember redeeming my sticker on Friday evenings for one personal pepperoni pizza that I would take home and eat while watching T.G.I.Friday sitcoms. It was through "Book-It" that I found my favorite author as a child, Rahl Dahl. Rahl Dahl wrote wonderful children's books that I could never seem to put down. The first book of his that I ever read was "James and the Giant Peach"; this quite possibly could be my favorite book of his. I can't think of a book of his though that I didn't read growing up. I think it was his imaginative characters and hilarious plots that entertained my juvenile brain. To this day humor is what I enjoy reading and what I often like to incorporate into my own writing. To me, Rahl Dahl mastered writing with humor, which made reading for pizza so much more enjoyable as a young girl.

It was fourth or fifth grade that I first learned how to write poetry. My favorite type of poem we learned how to write was the Haiku. It was tricky counting out syllables and still having the poem make sense but there was nothing more enjoyable than completing a poem with such restrictions. I began writing poetry in my free time, which I kept in a notebook with pink pages. At the time free verse wasn't something that I knew too much about so most of my poems had the same abab rhyme scheme. At the same time that I became interested in poetry I also developed the dream to someday design greeting cards for my own card shop. Therefore, many of the poems I wrote became text for Mother's Day, Christmas, wedding and Easter cards that I made out of construction paper and markers. Looking back they were pretty cheesy poems and cards but they always seem to make my mom cry tears of joy.

Towards my seventh and eighth grade year in school I became less interested in my own works and more interested in those of Bronte, Poe and Shakespeare. I learned a lot during my last two years of grade school that prepared me for entrance into high school. We read and studied just about everything there was to know about "Romeo and Juliet." I was amazed; I had never read anything that combined romance, humor and tragedy in such an eloquent way. We really didn't write a lot during those two years, which was a bit disappointing, but we did do a lot of reading and vocabulary. This didn't stop me from writing on my own. In fact, our principal asked me to read a piece I had written for my eighth grade class at the graduation mass. It was a pretty big for me and of course as expected my mother cried.

This wasn't the first time I was given the honor to stand out amongst my classmates. As a matter of fact, I was one of seven kids in my eighth grade math class who tested into high school level math. Every afternoon I got to leave school to take a high school math course at a local

all boys' high school. It felt good to be recognized for my abilities. As a child the praise of others kept me motivated. I was always a conscientious student taking longer on projects than most children my age. In fact some say I was a perfectionist. I can't look back and blame my parents for pushing me too hard. I was the one pushing myself. It felt good to know that I made good grades and that teachers respected me and trusted me to take on and be successful with all my projects.

Freshman year rolled around and I found myself in the halls of an all girls' Catholic high school. My entrance exam scores and transcripts from grade school had landed me in the Honors program. Already, I was subconsciously pushing myself to be the best of the best. What I didn't realize was that for the first time in my life it was going to be hard to stand out amongst the other girls in my classes. Girls began comparing grades as soon as teachers returned our first assignment to see who was mostly likely to be first in our class. I quickly learned that it was hard for me to keep pushing myself to be the best when often girls who were just a little bit better surrounded me. I think the biggest heartbreak of my freshman year came in my Honors English class.

On the first day of class Mrs. Bochan handed each student a red file folder. She then told us that this was to be our portfolio for the next four years. Any and every piece of writing for the next four years, from first draft to final, was to be in this folder. This seemed all well and fine to me until Mrs. Bochan returned my first writing assignment. Mine came back torn to pieces with the blood of a red ink pen to prove it. I was shocked; I had never received such bad marking in grade school. In fact, I was often complimented on my writing. Not knowing what to do, I immediately approached Mrs. Bochan. She encouraged me to keep working on that piece along with future class writings. By the end of my freshman year I had learned more than how to write a processional letter, a narrative, a comparative essay and a 3.5 essay, I had learned that to be a successful writer you have to be able to learn from any criticism just as you would any praise. As hard as it was to hear back then I can look back and say that each and every comment I received on my very first high school English paper has helped me to become a better writer. The greatest lesson learned is that of constructive criticism.

Throughout my sophomore year in high school I began to realize that I wasn't going to be the best at everything. I began to realize that I needed to not be so hard on myself. I had to teach myself to let go of things I couldn't control. All I could do was my best and after that I just had to let go. This was hard for me to do but in the long run I think I am a healthier person for it. Junior year I found my place to shine. As an

elective class that year I decided to put my writing to use by taking an introduction to newspaper class. Writing for newspaper was completely different from any other type of writing I had previously done. In all my English classes my teachers encouraged me to show not tell which often resulted in lengthy assignments enhanced with detail after detail. Journalism was quite the opposite all that anyone really wanted to hear in news was the facts. Once I finally caught on to concise writing I began to excel in my journalism class, which naturally made it my favorite class in high school. At the end of the year the members of the class were able to apply for a position on the newspaper staff. With the encouragement of our teacher/ journalism advisor I applied for Editor-in-Chief; my fellow classmates voted me to this position.

There was nothing more that I loved better than working and leading our newspaper staff. Each month it was so satisfying to walk from homeroom-to-homeroom delivering stacks of "The Rosecall." It was hard not to enjoy it when you were receiving praise from people throughout the school and awards from organizations throughout the city and nation for your writing. I soon realized that newspaper was going to be my ticket to an out of state college. I had watched all my friends fill out their applications to the University of Kentucky and knew that my only way to get away and really experience college was by going somewhere I would hardly know anyone. I also knew that my parents were going to have a hard time being able to afford sending me to an out-of-state college. They had two more kids besides me to send through Catholic education, which is just shy of what some colleges' tuition can cost. So journalism became my vehicle. I applied to over six colleges and waited each day for a scholarship response. My top two colleges because of their strong journalism programs were Ball State and Indiana University. Naturally, when Ball State offered me the Presidential scholarship, which entitled me to half off tuition for four years, I jumped at the chance.

There wasn't much adjustment to be made once I settled in at Ball State. I was happy with my decision and to this day can honestly say I would not have made any other choice if given the opportunity. The things I have learned at Ball State exceed far beyond the classroom. While I can't say I would have chosen another university or college, I can say I might have put more thought into what I wanted to do with my life after college. Looking back, after all the changes that have taken place in my life I wonder why eighteen-year-olds are ever asked to choose what they want to do for the rest of their lives at such a young age. I know for sure at eighteen I had no sense of who I really was or what I really wanted out of my future. I feel I have a much better sense now but I am sure that even at twenty-two I still haven't figured it all out.



I went into my freshman year of college pursuing a bachelor's degree in journalism with an emphasis in news. After getting so involved with my newspaper in high school I was sure this is what I wanted to do with my life. I quickly began to realize that I did not want to live the life of a journalist. I learned that the profession required long and unpredictable hours and knew that someday I wanted to have a family of my own. The thought of constantly battling between work and home made the chase for an award-winning article much less appealing. I jumped between changing my major from journalism to business. In the end, I kept with journalism. Under the advisement of my Honors advisor I decided to take an introduction to public relations class.

It was this class taught by Dr. Becky McDonald that made up my mind. Though it was only an introduction class, she made the world of public relations so appealing that I just couldn't pass it up. To me public relations was a way for me to combine my love of writing with my love of working with people. So just before my sophomore year in college, I declared my major to be public relations. After my sophomore year I did my first internship with Churchill Downs in the marketing department. I can honestly say that was the best job I have ever had. I loved helping put together events and concerts that took place around the track. My role was small but I picked up a lot of helpful information just by being immersed in the working world. My next internship was in the public relations department at Hoosier Park racetrack. This is when I first began to discover that public relations was not all I thought it to be. I spent my first two and a half years of college chasing a dream that wasn't really mine. When I finally stopped to take a look at where my drive for money and success had taken me I realized that I wasn't even pursuing the major that I really wanted. I considered changing my major. I even looked into it only to realize that if I switched majors I would be in college a lot longer than I had ever anticipated. I decided to just stick it out with the consolation that in order to graduate I had fifteen hours of electives to fulfill in any area that I pleased.

During the end of my junior year in college I began experimenting with different types of writing. I had kept a fairly regular journal since I was a senior in high school, but most of my entries were beginning to look like the early drafts of poetry. I decided that for some of the elective hours I needed to complete I would take a poetry class for fun. It was an introduction class but it caught my interest enough that I enrolled in two more English classes the following semester. One was a poetry workshop class taught by my now thesis advisor, River Karner. The other, a creative writing non-fiction class taught by Jean Harper.

The class taught by River Karner was a stepladder for me as a poet. Going into the class I knew not much if anything about writing a solid poem. Coming out of the class I felt confident enough with my abilities as a poet that I have been able to base my Honors thesis upon it. I had a lot of words and thoughts but putting them together in a way that made sense was nearly impossible without Karner's guidance. Her class encouraged growth. As a class we provided feedback on one another's poems. This helped me to look at my own poetry through the eyes of someone else. I found that often others view your work much differently than you see it yourself. This change in perspective has helped me to write with an audience in mind, which often provokes me to take a chance I might not have ever taken with my writing.

Though I have found a great interest in poetry, I believe I found my calling in creative writing non-fiction. I enjoy the freedom creative writing allows but I guess there is still that journalist in me who loves to tell tough he truth. The class taught by Jean Harper really opened me to a side of myself I never really let shine. The workshop nature of the class gave me the opportunity to share my work from its early beginnings to its completion with other peers. I had never really experienced anything quite like it before and though it made me a bit nervous at first in the end I learned much more than I ever thought I could have. Every class period was a chance to write and learn how to better my writing.

Both of these classes lead me to something that I should have realized all my life; I am not the type of person that wants to wear a suit everyday to work ready to take on corporate America. Writing will always be a part of my future, though I will not be able to spend the rest of my life typing only memos and press releases. I need to have the flexibility to write what I know and what I see everyday. I don't know what took me so long to figure it out. Maybe I had finally grown into myself. Maybe it was the fact that I had never taken an English class at Ball State prior to my senior year. I tested out of all English requirements my freshman year and I sometimes wonder if I hadn't tested out would I have changed my major to English.

Being given the opportunity to complete my thesis has been my second chance. This collection of poetry is an extension upon a path I wasn't able to fully follow throughout my college career. I didn't just want my thesis to reflect what I learned as an undergrad, therefore I chose my thesis to cover an area of study in which I am continually growing and learning. With each draft of each poem included in my collection I learned more about myself as a writer and a human being. "Wingless Wonders: A Collection of Poetry" encompasses love, death, friendship,

heartache, humor, family and more. Each poem is a small story about life most often as I have lived it. If the poem itself is not real life then it has often inspired by incidents or people who have made their way in or out of my own life. Without further ado, I would like to welcome you to share in the experience of this project. I only hope that you enjoy what you read and are able for a brief moment to look at life's experiences through a different set of eyes...Mine.

## More Than A Crush

Nothing about him ever struck my attention  
until the night he told me he liked my t-shirt.

"Thanks,"

I said tugging at the waist of it.

"It's a bit small.

I bought it at a vintage store in Broadripple."

We were talking about other stores  
when I was reminded of the men's shirt

I had fallen in love with  
earlier that week.

"I love it when guys wear pink.

The other day,

I saw this pink polka-dotted shirt at

Vintage Smintage in the Village.

I almost bought it

but I had no one to buy it for."

\*\*\*

He caught my attention a week later  
at a keg party in the basement of his house.

"Hey, I went to that store in the Village  
you were telling me about.

I saw this really cool shirt as I was walking out.

It might be the one you were talking about;

It was a light pink with maroon polka dots.

I almost bought it

but I thought that would be weird."

I smiled,

noticing the pink t-shirt he wore

under his white fleece jacket,

"You should have bought it.

I love that shirt; someone should be wearing it."

\*\*\*

We were partners in Euchre a week later.

I didn't know how to play, but he didn't seem to  
mind.

I learned. We almost won.

When the night was coming to an end

he suggested we go to his house

to visit his roommate and my friend.

The ride to his house was short.

We sat in his Jeep for a moment  
our faces nudging in the dark at one another's lips.  
I pulled away quickly and laughed  
childishly running to his backdoor.  
He invited me to stay for the night  
and lent me a pair of oversized basketball shorts,  
We cuddled in his twin bed.  
His hands only wandered once, touching my thigh  
as he fixed the shorts  
that had bunched at the top of my leg.  
We woke at 7:30 and he drove me to my car.  
I had a doctor's appointment at 8 a.m.

\*\*\*

That same night he had his roommate call me  
to invite me to watch  
the National Championship game  
with a bunch of the guys at a local bar.  
I knew he would be there so I changed  
into a lavender v-neck sweater  
and wore a matching necklace  
I bought last summer at a vintage store back home.  
It made me feel feminine.  
At the bar we talked around one another for a while,  
trying to hide our attraction.  
"How was your doctor's appointment?" he broke the  
ice.  
"Fine, except for the fact it really wasn't that early."  
"What time was it?"  
"Umm, let's just say 10ish."  
"Really, what time was it?"  
"You don't want to know"  
"Tell me."  
"Umm, noon," I said sheepishly.  
He half laughed, rolled his eyes and returned to the  
game.  
A few minutes later he looked back, smirked and said,  
"I hate you."  
"Really?"  
"No. I far from hate you," he grinned.  
"Well, I like you," I replied.  
"Why, you don't even know me?"  
"Well, I just like you,"  
I smiled,  
"And I like the way you look."

**NOTICE: Missing Cat**

The cat got out the day Aunt Valenda lost her mind.  
I never really noticed she'd miss holidays at a time.  
Then one year at Christmas,  
She asked, "When I die will you throw my ashes into  
the sea  
To feed the fish  
To feed the dolphin  
I one day hope to be."

I had found her to be interestingly odd,  
a free spirit with a hippie heart.  
Until the day she said the cat (who none of us had  
ever seen)  
ran out, I never understood.

Dad blames her imbalance on the Arabians,  
'their hookahs,  
their drugs.'  
Maybe it was the shock he said they gave her back in  
'72  
when the doctors plugged her up.

Now she calls me from the prison of insane.  
Leaves thirty-minute messages on my machine,  
"What's going on with all that,  
the w-w-w dot com  
dot com  
dot com bullshit?"

She screams and begs me to break her out.  
But I won't.  
Maybe if she sleeps this mania off the cat will stop  
crying  
and her mind will come home.

**Tilted**

As I complained about how I looked tonight,  
you ironed out my insecurities  
by leaning in to say, "You smell nice."

That made me smile,

but you always seem to  
accomplish just that.

It's always up and down with you, though.  
I never know when I'll miss my chance.

Like the night you told me you liked me.  
I finally mustered up the courage  
to tell you the same and  
two days later  
you were dating someone else.

I've realized it's never perfect with you --  
like blown glass.  
Each breath I take makes it all look  
different.

### **Just Another Holiday** **12/31/02**

In the middle of the night  
after dozing off to a film  
you've seen before,  
something wakes you to a  
blue screen that burns your eyes.  
That's when you realize that  
today is just another day  
in a whole line of days.  
And it becomes refreshing to know  
that this day,  
or any other day for that matter,  
matters no more than the next.

### **Before I Moved**

I called you. I gave in  
to ask for the pants  
you borrowed  
the night I gave in.  
Didn't want you to keep them  
to have a memory of me,  
so I asked for them back

to be left with a memory of you.  
They laid on my floor  
for a week and a half,  
Now straight from the dryer  
I'm holding them close  
cotton to mouth.  
Soon, in a cardboard box  
folded and packed  
they'll smell of you,  
mostly nothing at all.

### **Muted Tuesday**

Hand painted skies  
not blue  
or gray  
but a soft shade of white  
linger overhead like particles  
of dreams abandoned.  
Heat in the traffic of  
the sunless summer morning  
dances from the pavement  
capturing childhood imaginings of  
workers in suits.  
Red taillights wink  
between  
the daydreams of drivers  
inching their way  
to faxes and swivel chairs.  
Muted Tuesday  
when the world seems to crawl  
and the ghost dreams of children  
haunt the corporate halls.

### **4 a.m.**

the train calls at 4 a.m.  
at 6 they'll come for the trash and  
rolling over to kiss your temple  
you smile and complain about the noise  
i'll get out of bed to shut the door asking myself  
how long it had been since i let love in



## Lost With a Diploma

I used to know what I wanted.  
Smart.  
Pushed myself to be the best.  
Until it all rolled to a stop.  
    All the love  
    All the knowledge  
    All the determination.

After four years of hard work and  
hours spent pressing myself forward,  
I'm living on a  
dead-end street in a 'city of possibility.'

Nowhereville has raised yet another nobody girl.

    "You've made it."  
"You're just bored."  
    "Something will come your way."  
    "I'm sure they'll call."

What do they know  
about being 22 and  
having everything you know  
    All the friends  
    All the projects  
    All the freedom  
replaced with a piece of paper?

After you've graduated  
and people regroup  
to fill your position as  
    friend  
    student  
    co-worker,  
it begins to feel as if  
you've never existed.

The only proof-  
    a signed parchment  
cheaply framed  
and mounted on the wall.

### **Fortune Cookie**

Last year I was convinced  
that some sort of Asian mafia  
was out to get me.

Everyday and  
at all hours of the night  
I would receive phone calls from  
men and women speaking one  
of many Asian languages.

I wasn't quite sure  
if there was a hit out on me  
but then one day  
the Chinese food delivery man peeled  
out of the alley behind my apartment and  
practically ran me down with his car.

For some reason  
I had pissed someone off  
though I really can't say why.  
Although, there was that one time  
that I ate my fortune cookie before dinner-  
(which I have heard is bad luck)  
then shorted my sister and ate another after dinner  
in hopes of correcting my mistake.

### **Family Reunion**

Uncle Strap is frying catfish reliving his high school  
fame while his wife Nancy, who hardly comes around,  
is fighting off another migraine with her credit card at  
the mall. Aunt Lynda is preaching on Prozac chased  
with Vodka tonic and lime to her sister-in-law Alisha  
who's been in the backyard getting high on marijuana  
she doesn't even own. Mama is entertaining the kids  
with her fame as the undefeated 'Butt-dart Queen.'  
Squeezing a quarter between the crack of her pants, as  
the children squeal and scream, she waddles to the red  
Solo cup she releases Washington in. Kenny is less  
than pleased with the trick his sister taught his sons.  
Tied up on his cell phone dealing business on family  
time, he motions for his refined wife Lisa who is

secretly cleaning her braces with her tongue. Keith's wife, Pam, who is pregnant with her third child tries to explain, "Marrying into this family is like marrying into the mafia; their closeness is insane." Keith isn't really paying attention he's too busy laughing at his own jokes. He doesn't even notice that Uncle Woody is taking Viagra and dancing in high heels. Todd is well and plastered throwing around horseshoes and the word fuck while Papa Johnny T. Dick is singing his karaoke rendition of "Hit Me With Your Best Shot." Somewhere across the way someone laughs and says, "Our family may be screwed up but we put the fun in dysfunctional."

### Through the Looking Glass

you caught my eye and fucked my mind  
with prisms upon layers of life  
that i lost sight of  
one morning, sin anteojos\*, stumbling to the bath.  
skipped the mirror, missed the crow's feet  
scratching at the corners of my eyes.  
i was slipping down porcelain,  
watching my feet surface as i inhaled.  
never did i think you'd see past the surface of me  
corroded like this leaky old drain.

i had given up on the possibility of love that night,  
and there you were  
walking out the door, watching me  
charcoal drunk and insensibly alone  
sip bourbon through a cocktail straw.  
to me you were nothing more than a pretty face,  
caught up in who's who;  
i had given up on being cool years ago.

turning you said,  
"i am not the guy you think I am.  
if you just took a chance you'd realize  
we are more alike than you think."  
but I couldn't believe a word,  
you were the icon of all that had wrecked me.  
and despite it all,  
you saved my grace and tucked me in.

now i lie here contemplating the other side of the  
mirror,  
squealing silence as smooth as the white wall.  
i listen to the music that works my mind,  
the pulsating rhythm,  
which lets me dot my i's just four inches to the left.  
the fantasy races my mind  
the smell of you,  
your coat,  
your cut-off running shirt,  
honey wheat skin imperfect.

my skepticism breaks at you into red beads of  
perspiration  
hovering my upper lip molded by a mother's breast.  
with the palm of an old soul, i wipe the fog from the  
mirror.  
the core of you is all clear when it's inside out  
captured in molecules dancing on air;  
that's where I find myself in every reflection of you.

\*without glasses

### **Worm**

Daddy's little girl  
before dress-up, training bras  
and boys ever came,  
she spent Sunday afternoons in the garden  
with him  
while her mother watched  
from the kitchen window  
washing dishes  
at the sink.  
Golden curls sprouted  
from her bald head  
level with her father's shin.  
Occasionally, she looked up  
to meet his faceless silhouette  
backed by the sinking sun.  
Her diapered bottom cushioned her  
from the earth as she  
studied the green leaves  
shading her bare skin from the sun,

admired the deep purple skin  
of eggplant,  
tasted the sweet acid of  
cherry tomatoes from the vine,  
and fingered the coarse shell of yellow squash.  
Everything around her new and fresh,  
her chubby fingers would dig  
the cool freshly cultivated soil.  
One day something rare  
with its moist body slipping  
in and out of the dirt.  
She flipped her head back  
and held its wriggling body above her.  
She held life in her hands  
and released it  
into her mouth  
not ever knowing  
if it was the beginning or the end.

### **Reflection After a Friend's Death**

Laying lifelessly tan and black  
with each beat I fade away  
till I become a rack  
of bones and skin.  
Thoughts of mortality  
killing me slowly  
and spinning fast  
like ladybugs on their backs.  
Hear the children,  
screaming sugar dusted grapes,  
crying, shouting then whispering,  
'ENOUGH, enough!'  
as I search my mind for your face,  
familiar and unclear.  
At my death will I find my face in a wall?  
China beauty etched delicately, eyes and mouth  
trapped for eternity between life and wood  
of the strong and standing core  
of the tree that sheltered me  
on the night bruised and sore  
I held the pills in my hand

chalk dusted fingers of a child.  
Remember, I wept until  
I saw you styled  
in the stars.  
And to Orion I prayed-  
and pleaded  
“In flooded streets, barefoot I’d wade...”  
to have you back that autumn night.

### **The Tag Faces Out**

Had I not gone to the bathroom at work  
I would have never even known that I put my  
panties on inside out.

Somehow  
when getting dressed,  
I always manage to do this.

I really wasn’t too worried when it was just  
a sock  
or two-  
    come to think of it-  
    (it’s more comfortable on the toes  
    with the seams facing out.)

But then just yesterday  
it was my bra,  
    and well,  
it’s quite difficult to get undressed  
when it’s on inside out.

### **One Minute Memory**

My mother sits there,  
head down.  
The cascade of  
afternoon sunlight filters  
through thin, cotton curtains  
into the darkened kitchen.  
One dish soap wrinkled hand rests  
on the round faux wood Formica table,

---

the other covers her face.  
She rarely breaks down  
in the middle of the afternoon.  
Just takes it all in  
and cries herself to sleep.  
Suddenly, the light that surrounds her  
draws me in.  
Stunned by celestial presence,  
I touch her hair.  
She looks up at me-  
glazed hazel eyes.  
“Don’t worry Mommy.  
Matma will be okay;  
she is in a better place now.”  
She wipes her tears.  
I am three years old.

### **Aura**

He looked at me and said,  
“All I see can see  
coming from you  
is white,  
almost silver.”  
“How do you do it,” I asked.  
“It’s looking at the spaces in between,”  
he replied.  
“If you looked hard enough  
between what is really there  
and what is not  
there is so much more to be seen.”

### **In the Parking Lot at Arby’s**

Some days I find myself  
thinking of you.  
It always takes me back to eating in the car.

Our philosophical nonsense led us to this ritual.

You  
and I

---

in my beaten up Bessie.

Sandwiches in hand  
and the radio on,  
we'd dilly dally the time away  
over a large coke and a bucket of fries  
we had paid for  
in coins.

We were poor,  
I never seemed to notice.  
People always stared;  
I think we made them wonder

How two people could have it all--  
dinner,  
music  
and a cigarette  
without ever leaving the steering wheel.

### Night Shift

The sky turns from navy to black. Somewhere in  
Middle America a young man clocks out at the local  
mini-mart as a police officer starts the ignition and  
goes on duty. The two meet fifteen minutes later.

Officer: Hey you, yeah you,  
on the dark street  
with your black hooded jacket  
that covers your milk white face,  
hides your ivory hands.

Young Man: Yes Mr. Officer,  
in your black car  
with it's black windows  
that hide the black uniform  
covering your dark chocolate skin.

Officer: What are you doing,  
this hour-  
this part of town?  
May I see some I.D.?

Young Man: What's that Mr. Officer?  
May I have a ride home?  
The lights flashing  
red and blue fireworks  
all the way to my door.